



Contact: A Journal for Contemporary Music (1971-1988)

<http://contactjournal.gold.ac.uk>

## Citation

Jones, David. 1976. 'Review of Greek Month in London, November 1975, *Recordings of Contemporary Greek Music: Greek Composers 2nd Series, Greek Electronic Music, Vol. 1, and Jani Christou, Vol. 1*'. **Contact**, 13. pp. 36-37. ISSN 0308-5066.

RECORDINGS OF CONTEMPORARY GREEK MUSIC:  
 GREEK COMPOSERS 2ND SERIES, EMI Greece CSDX 62-66  
 GREEK ELECTRONIC MUSIC, VOL. 1, EMI Greece CSDX 67  
 JANI CHRISTOU, VOL. 1, EMI Greece CSDX 68  
 (Imports available from specialist dealers)

## DAVID JONES

The ICA policy in preparation for the Greek Month in London of taking 'soundings' from Greek and European specialists resident in Athens and London and then acting independently of given recommendations resulted in a now well-publicised outcry of criticism uniting the Right and Left in Greece, with pertinent questions raised in the Greek parliament and the press. The final programmes were not, indeed, fully representative of Greek art at this important time in its history. The selection of the pictorial arts on view at the ICA and Wildenstein Galleries implied an outdated touristic and internationalistic viewpoint, ignoring much of a basic Hellenic identity. In music, where the standard of works was excellent, no composers under the age of 39 were represented, and all except two were resident outside Greece. Social and economic together with political factors have forced these artists to make a career abroad, often at the price of a certain loss of national identity. As with all Eastern European nationals, the ties of homeland are strong and the severance is never complete. The return to historic and positive roots in a contemporary reassessment of Byzantine origins, together with those of philosophy, classical antiquity and naturalistic forces, was felt strongly in the works represented. Whatever may be said of the ICA's policy and the composers who withdrew works in the understandable interests of national solidarity, enough of a selection of the important figures were played to represent a cross-section of what is important in Greek music today.

The programme of Jani Christou and Iannis Xenakis presented by the New Philharmonia Orchestra under Elgar Howarth at the Festival Hall on November 13 showed the contrast of approach between the two outstanding and original minds in Greek music. The clarity of vision and control of compositional and instrumental resources in Christou's *Patterns and Permutations* presents a close discourse within an integrated structure. It is a score containing hidden problems of balance and interpretation not adequately solved in this performance, which concentrated on the subtle lines while overlooking the cumulative dramatic drive essential not only in the vital opening bars, but as a generative forward pulse throughout the score, in which the strong melodic sequences are paths within a stronger organic unity. The same composer's *Tongues of Fire*, however, was projected with subtle yet powerful intensity. The direct communication of these two works contrasted well with the three by Xenakis, in which complexity of materials and objectives and his resultant use of 'sound masses' in *Antikhthon* and *Synaphai* come dangerously near to dissipating the instrumental textures with an incessant battery of sounds which, to me at least, failed to communicate anything. In contrast, *Aroua* for twelve solo strings is a beautifully conceived work, which in the New Philharmonia's sensitive performance outlined the interplay of delicate strands of diversified soloistic and textural material in soft and gently austere sounds.

A lecture on Nikos Skalkottas by John Papaioannou followed by three of his compositions covered the work of the father figure of the 'new music' in Greece. The two remaining concerts were of chamber dimensions. The Round House event on November 16 featured two works by Anestis Logothetis with the London Sinfonietta under the composer's direction in *Odysee* and the Arditti String Quartet in *Klangraum I.II.III*. The score of each work was displayed on slides during the performance. The former allowed the Sinfonietta to exercise their creative abilities in material and notational procedures relatively new to them, and the results were a highly interesting exploration of controlled and expanding densities, performed with conviction even if not fully realising the work's totality. In *Klangraum* a more restricted use of 'bands of sound masses' moving slowly towards an impressive climax was the characteristic feature. The Arditti Quartet also played works by Yannis Ioannides (a closely integrated essay in homophony), Dimitri Terzakis (a convincing exposition of a single idea within a linear microtonal language of contracting and expanding time units) and Xenakis' *ST-4*: an expressive performance of the last named which encompassed the work's technical difficulties with apparent ease. Under the direction of Elgar Howarth, the Sinfonietta with the versatile Michael Rippon introduced an essentially English version of Christou's *Anaparastasis . . . astron*, though it remained a convincing account of the inner struggle

towards articulation of a man in the grip of an insurmountable tension. On any future excursions into music-theatre works of this nature, the Sinfonietta needs to overcome its inhibitions in the sphere of sound combined with gesture to understand the purpose behind the notes. For an utterly convincing performance of this work, listen to the recording of it included in this review.

The programme in the ICA Theatre on November 22 introduced the integration of instruments, live electronics and prerecorded tape in ensemble pieces by Adamis, Logothetis, Vassiliadis and Mamangakis, as well as the purely instrumental *Nomoi* by Terzakis, all in authoritative performances by Greek musicians closely associated with the works. Michael Adamis directed precise and clearly articulated performances of his own *Kratima*, concise in its treatment of live and processed materials, which revealed a new clarity of structure since I last heard it in Athens, and Terzakis' *Nomoi*, which showed a lyrical expressivity of gesture within an exposition of Byzantine derivations with strange cross-references of language superimposed.

Soloists with prerecorded tape were featured in the three remaining works, the most impressive of which was *En Pyri* by Stephannos Vassiliadis played by Andreas Rodoussakis (double bass with live amplification by contact microphones) with sound projection by the composer. From the moment of the emergence of quasi tape loops of incredible beauty and a look of indecision on the face of the performer, we were off on a sound journey of discovery through seemingly uncharted seas. Played in a larger hall, the work's effect could have been overwhelming; in the confines of the ICA Theatre the dimension was different though not less illuminating. Inspired by a strange event that took place on the eve of the death of Christou, the eight-track tape treats the sounds of fire and nature together with instrumental, vocal and other concrete material; the double bass sounds are those associated with wood and are of an essentially non-musical calibre. Sounds of stillness and tension are set against a slow accumulation of tape material, with a relatively low intensity of an elemental character and nocturnal echoes of nature, moving towards a powerful climax of exhilarating intensity, which interacted with sympathetic vibrations from the Takis sound sculpture *Luminous Electromagnetic Musical* (part of the ICA art exhibition) and leading to a high sound amplitude ultimately diminishing in volume to the peace of sounds suspended in silence. This work confirmed my previous impression of Vassiliadis from the 'Fourth Hellenic Week' in Athens in 1971, as a highly original sound artist.

The other two pieces were expressionistic vehicles for the versatile and highly talented flautist Stella Gadedi. In *Five Synthemata* by Anestis Logothetis, taped sounds of imaginatively projected piano sonorities are used as a point of departure for the soloist to create her own sound-world. The experiment worked successfully, having a two-dimensional quality frequently absent from tape music. Direct pitch material was limited: it could perhaps have been replaced completely by multiphonics, key and air sounds and pitch bending, which were used so extensively and with such care in this performance. During *Parastasis* by Nikos Mamangakis, the flautist increased her range of activities to include vocalise and theatrical elements, with an electronic tape, the dramatic intensity of which is heightened by alienated speech and extracts from the 30s Nuremberg rallies to emphasise the anti-fascist nature of the sound dialogue.

Coverage during the month also included a week of concerts of music for electronic tape and a single night of popular music with Maria Farandouri. In providing such a panorama, the London Music Digest introduced to London audiences many of the divergent currents of activity that constitute Greek music today. Frequently demanding pieces were given in authoritative performances, and the 'Greek Month in London' gave the largest exposure of Greek music here outside the programmes of the English Bach Festival.

Contained in the recordings under review are a number of works included in the 'Greek Month in London'. For an extensive survey, 'Greek Composers 2nd Series' gives good value, presenting 14 out of the 19 works played in the 'Hellenic Weeks of Contemporary Music' held in Athens. The first record presents four works from the first two festivals, including the attractive and imaginative *Six Likes* for solo tuba by Theodore Antoniou and the evocative *Trittys* by Nikos Mamangakis. The other records in this set are of works covered in my review of the 'Fourth Hellenic Week'.<sup>1</sup> The performances and recordings are of excellent quality. Records of electronic music do not generally have a relaxed atmosphere of the kind encountered on 'Greek Electronic Music', Vol. I. The answer may lie with the use of the VCS 3 coupled to a restraint and even a dry humour, for the pieces are well conceived if not substantial in content, and indicate contrast in approaches to the media.

In the first issue of a projected series of records devoted to Jani Christou, four works from his last years are given the outstanding

performances the music demands from artists concerned in their premieres. The frenetic nature of *Anaparastasis 3* and to a lesser extent that of *Anaparastasis 1* demand the extrovert 'theatrical' element present in the Greek personality combined with an amazing degree of control over the forces unleashed. Coupled to the psychological drama of Christou's work is a remarkable sound palette used with originality, where 'sound masses' are projected with an almost spiritual quality, giving rise to completely different results from their use in the hands of Logothetis or Xenakis while still retaining certain of their qualities. This is an important issue of challenging music by one of the original minds of our time.

#### NOTES:

<sup>1</sup>David Jones, 'Athens: the Fourth Hellenic Week of Contemporary Music', *Contact 4* (Spring 1972), pp.17-19.